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AUTHOR Norton, Robert E.
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ABSTRACT

Because of an expressed need for staff development for vocational education administrators, research was conducted to identify and verify the competencies needed by vocational administrators; competency-based modularized materials were developed to address those competencies; and a variety of competency-based training program strategies were devised and implemented in several states. The initial identification of competencies was based upon input from 11 experienced vocational administrators and the results of a literature search and review. The initial task statements formulated in the process were submitted to a select national group of 130 administrators for verification. The competencies were then clustered into 30 groups for materials development purposes. A four-stage development process was used to prepare the modules: (1) preparation of a module prospectus; (2) preparation of a field-review version; (3) preparation of a field-test version; and (4) preparation of the published edition. As a result, 34 modules and 15 guides were developed. Each module covers a single broad competency or skill area needed by administrators. They feature a variety of learning activities that allow skill learning and application in practice and a final demonstration of the competency in an actual administrative situation. The modules can be used in preservice or inservice workshops, graduate courses, internships, and other programs. The guides contain a large amount of cognitive material for leadership personnel. (KC)

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COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Presented at the
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Robert E. Norton
Senior Research and Development Specialist

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CENTER ON EDUCATION
AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1900 KENNY ROAD • COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210
Telephone (614) 292-4353 or (800) 848-4815

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Competency-Based Education for Administrators

Need

Ask any group of vocational administrators worthy of their position whether they would like to improve their skills, and you quickly will get a very positive response. Most administrators know that, today, you must keep learning just to keep up with rapidly changing curricular needs, instructional technology, and legal issues--to say nothing about getting ahead or establishing a positive role model for the rest of your staff. Regardless of frequent comments to the contrary, most administrators and other vocational educators are also strongly motivated by pure professionalism--the desire to do the best job possible.

We must never forget, however, that may complex and some unique skills are required to successfully manage vocational programs. Nor can we expect administrators to automatically possess all the needed competencies at the time of employment. We must provide viable options for preservice, as well as inservice, administrators to improve their competence. The traditional university courses in general education administration, although helpful, are not adequate in themselves.

A number of real concerns have faced vocational administrators who wanted to improve their administrative competence. Some of the more frequently mentioned concerns were as follows:

1. There is little time available for professional development activities.
2. Most administrator education programs focus primarily on the needs of the general education administrator.
3. Many administrator education programs focus on the theory of administration, rather than addressing the actual ability to perform important administrative tasks.
4. Most inservice training programs are campus-based, group-paced, and inflexible concerning the time at which the study is offered.
5. Only limited research has been conducted to identify the competencies really important to vocational administrators.
6. Few training materials exist that address administrative concerns as they apply to vocational and technical education.

At this point, you may be beginning to wonder what has been done, if anything, to change the situation. Fortunately, all is not as glum as this introductory scenario might cause you to think. During the last several years, staff at the Center on Education and Training for Employment and in several states have been working together to address the serious need for providing effective leadership training for vocational education administrators. The United States Department of Education, the Center, fourteen state departments of education,[1] and many cooperating universities and local administrators have collaborated in an effort to improve the situation.

It is my pleasure to be able to highlight what has been done to alleviate most of the concerns previously mentioned and to suggest several viable options for improving administrative skills that are available to most, if not all of you. Thee major things have been accomplished, as follows:

1. Research has been conducted to identify and verify the competencies important to vocational administrators.

2. Competency-based modularized materials have been carefully developed to address those competencies.

3. A variety of competency-based training program strategies have been devised and implemented in several states.

Let's look at each of these accomplishments more closely.

Competency Identification Research

The initial identification of competencies was based upon (1) input from a select group of twelve experienced vocational administrators who participated in a DACUM workshop, and (2) the results of a literature search and review. The merger of task statements identified through DACUM and the literature review resulted in a tentative list of 191 task statements describing all known responsibilities of secondary and postsecondary administrators. These task were submitted to a select national group of 130 administrators for verification. A total of 92 percent of these administrators responded and indicated that 166 of the task statements were competencies important to

[1]The following states have supported the development efforts reported herein: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

the job of vocational administrator.[2] These competencies were then tentatively clustered into 30 groups for materials development purposes.

In January 1987, a new DACUM committee of eleven expert administrators representing both secondary and postsecondary vocational and technical education, was convened to update the research base. A total of 210 tasks were identified and clustered into 12 duty areas. Two-hundred one of these tasks were nationally verified as important to the job of vocational-technical administrator.[3] A copy of the Vocational Administrator Competency Profile which lists the verified tasks is attached as Appendix A.

Development of the Materials

The next major task was the development of the modularized materials needed to address the 166 competencies. The initial development and field testing of six prototype modules was supported by the United States Office of Education. These modules were well received by the administrator trainers and resource persons who used them. Some of the strongest support for the materials came from persons in states that were already moving toward the implementation of competency-based professional development programs for teachers.

To complete the development task, seven interested states organized a Consortium for the Development of Professional Materials for Vocational Education in 1978. The Consortium members combined their efforts to support the cooperative development, field testing, and implementation of competency-based programs and materials for vocational administrators.

The procedure used in developing and field testing the administrator modules can best be described as a cooperative process. In one of the first steps, the member states vote to establish the priority competencies for module development. Once these priorities are established, the state representatives are asked to nominate qualified persons who can assist Center staff as either consultant module writers or module reviewers. The nominees are contacted and asked to apply for the job of consultant

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[2]Robert E. Norton; Kristy L. Ross; Gonzalo Garcia; and Barry Hobart, The Identification and National Verification of Competencies Important to Secondary and Postsecondary Administrators of Vocational Education (Columbus, OH: The Center for Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1977).

[3]Robert E. Norton and Lois G. Harrington, Administrator Competency Study, Columbus, OH: The Center on Education and Training for Employment, The Ohio State University, 1987.

writer or reviewer on one or more of the modules to be developed. From these applications, Consortium staff select the most qualified persons available.

A four-stage development process is begun at that point to prepare the modules: (1) preparation of a module prospectus, (2) preparation of field-review version, (3) preparation of a field-test version, and (4) preparation of the published edition. A brief description of the procedures used at each stage of development follows.

Preparation of the module prospectus. The module prospectus is usually a four- to eight-page outline for the proposed module. It contains statements of the terminal and enabling objectives, an outline of the topics to be covered in the information sheets, descriptions of the proposed learning activities and feedback, a tentative list of the performance assessment criteria, and a list of the specific competency statements to be addressed by the module. The prospectus is generally drafted by the Consortium staff member assigned to the module, after he or she has analyzed the competencies to be covered and reviewed the available literature. The prospectus is further developed and refined, however, at a one-day conceptualization meeting involving the consultant writers and Consortium staff. Three copies of the refined prospectus are submitted to each state representative for review and critique by the persons each designates. A twenty-day turnaround time is requested so that the module writers can benefit from the critiques received as they prepare the field-review version.

Preparation of the field-review version. After the conceptualization meeting, the two consultant writers are asked to begin immediately to prepare information sheets, case studies, model answers, etc., based on their actual knowledge, experience, and expertise in the particular area. At the same time, the Center staff writer maintains contact with the consultant writers to answer questions, check on progress, and relay information received from the prospectus critiques. Once materials are received from the two consultants, the staff writer prepares the field-review version by merging, rewriting, editing, and formatting the material into a full-blown draft of the module. It is then reviewed internally by another Consortium staff member before duplication of the field-review copies. Six copies of the field-review version of the module are sent either to the state representative or directly to the persons previously designated for voluntary reviews in each state. A module reviewer's checklist and directions for completing the reviews accompany each module. At the same time, three paid consultant reviewers are also asked to provide detailed reviews and written critiques of the module. Again, a twenty-day review period is utilized so that the reviewers' comments can be obtained as quickly as possible and used in preparing the field-test version.

Preparation of the field-test version. All the field-review module checklists and the written suggestions received are summarized and analyzed as the major input into development of the field-test version of the module. Commonly, two or three Consortium staff members review the comments and suggestions for improvement and decide on the changes to be made by the staff writer. When necessary, another consultant may be employed or one or both of the initial consultants may be asked to supply needed material. Once the field-test version has been prepared, it is again

reviewed internally by another Consortium staff member before duplication for field test purposes. Each member state and/or cooperative institution of higher education receives thirty copies of each module for field testing. In addition to the modules, field-test guidelines and instruments are provided for use by both the resource persons and administrator trainees. In most states, and orientation and training session has also been conducted to prepare resource persons for their role in field testing.

Preparation of the published edition. At this stage of development, field-test data from all states is summarized and analyzed as a basis for preparation of the published version of each module. Our goal is to collect data from at least five different states and a minimum of fifty administrator trainees before revision is begun. Once published, copies of the module are supplied to each member state.

Preparation of Guides

At times the nature the nature of the content needing to be addressed did not lend itself to our module format. In these situations, where usually a large amount of cognitive material needs to be addressed, we have developed guides for our leadership personnel. To date, we have produced a total of fifteen guides on a wide variety of topics.

At this point, copies of the 34 modules and 15 guides developed are available to anyone desiring them from the American Association for Vocational Instructional Materials (AAVIM) in Athens, Georgia.

Nature of Modules

Each module covers a single broad competency or skill area (usually encompassing two or more related subtasks) needed by local administrators to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Through a variety of learning activities, learners obtain background information concerning the skill covered, apply that information in practice or simulated situations, and eventually demonstrate the competency in an actual administrative situation. During the final learning experience, the administrator's performance is assessed by a resource person, using a checklist of specific performance criteria.

The modules can be used in preservice or inservice workshops, graduate courses at universities, internship or externship leadership development programs, and other programs. While the modules are designed for individual use, permit self-pacing, and require few outside resources, they are not totally self-instructional. They should be used under the guidance of a qualified resource person who can advise learners and evaluate their progress. This might be a university professor, a state department of education supervisor, or an administrator at the state, regional, or local level.

For a summary of the major features of the modules developed, see Attachment B.

User Reactions

A few of the comments received from module users are presented in the following paragraphs. The first two statements reflect the feelings of two resource persons (teacher educators), and the latter comments summarize some of the verbatim comments of administrator trainees.

"The Center's modules are down to earth, to the point, and focus on administrative concerns as they apply to vocational education. There are many materials available to train general education administrators. However, materials which apply these concepts to a vocational education setting are extremely rare. These modules bridge that gap and, to my knowledge, are the only materials in America that adequately meet our training needs." (Chairperson, Department of Vocational Education)

"The modules have tremendous potential in the preparation of vocational supervisors and directors. I can see their effectiveness in both the pre- and inservice phases of our intern leadership development program. The modules were well received by our interns." (Director, Intern Leadership Development Program)

Administrator trainees, when asked what they liked best about the modules, have said--

". . . the common sense and theory combined."
". . . the true-to life experiences."
". . . cooperation and exchange with my resource person."
". . . being able to work at my own pace and convenience."
". . . opportunity to seek help from resource people."
". . . being given a chance to perform."

When trainees have been asked to compare their learning experiences using the modules with other types of educational experiences, the modules generally been favored on most factors. For example, when 79 trainees were asked to compare their experience in completing the module "Promote the Vocational Education Program" with their traditional college education courses, they responded as follows:

		Module	Traditional
a.	Generally more interesting	48	28
b.	Allows more personal contact to be made	48 29	45
c.	Activities are more motivating	46	29
d.	Allows more opportunity to work at your own pace	76	1
e.	Provides greater variety of experience	42	32
f.	Helps achieve greater competency in administrative skills	54	19
g.	More efficient in use of time	70	7

NOTE: The totals don't equal 79 because some persons did not respond to all items.

Alternative Training Program Strategies

While research and instructional materials development are helpful, they do not, by themselves, get the job of preservice or inservice training accomplished. Somehow the trainers and trainees must be brought together in effective settings for the necessary competency development to occur. Fortunately, we can report that most of the states involved in the Consortium also have been working to develop alternative training strategies that are more flexible, time efficient, and effective. Most of the strategies being used emphasize the competency-based approach to administrator preparation because it is ideally suited to a variety of traditional and alternative instructional settings.

We, at the Center, strongly recommend the competency-based administrator education (CBAE) approach because, as its name implies, it is an approach that focuses on training administrators in the specific skills they need in order to perform effectively on the job. Applicable to either a preservice or inservice situation, it differs from many of the traditional approaches in its emphasis on the evaluation of the trainee's actual performance of the specified competencies.

The essential elements of CBAE are as follows:

- Administrator competencies to be achieved are carefully identified, verified, and made public in advance.
- Criteria to be used in assessing achievement and the conditions under which achievement will be assessed are explicitly stated and made public in advance.
- Assessment of competency takes the administrators' knowledge into account but depends upon actual performance as the primary source of evidence.
- The training program provides for the individual development and evaluation of each of the competencies specified.
- Administrators progress through the training program at their own rate by demonstrating the attainment of specified competencies.

These essential elements can be implemented in courses, workshops, seminars, intern and extern programs, as well as in many staff development settings. You can incorporate the CBAE approach into your own self-managed professional development program by tying your planned activities directly to the specific competencies you which to acquire.

Of all the approaches being successfully implemented (see Attachment C), the internship and externship programs appear to be the most successful. Both the internship and externship are realistic and effective strategies for implementing the CBAE approach because they encourage preservice and inservice administrators to (1) assess their individual needs, (2) outline an individualized program of professional development, and (3) develop the competencies actually needed by local administrators of secondary and postsecondary vocational programs.[4]

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[4]For more information on CBAE, externships, and internships you may wish to refer to Robert E. Norton, Carol J. Spencer, and Lois G. Harrington, Resource Person's Guide to Implementing Competency-Based Administrator Education Concepts and Materials, part of the Competency-Based Vocational Education Administrator Module Series (Athens, GA: American Association for Vocational Instructional Materials, 1983).

The following are examples of operating internship programs:

- The Southern Illinois University at Carbondale Program (see Attachment D)
- Temple University's Leadership Intern Field Experience (LIFE) Program (see Attachment E)

The following are examples of operating externship programs:

- The Florida Vocational Administrator Extern Program, Florida International University, (see Attachment F)
- The CBAE Leadership Development Program: State of Arkansas
- The Extern Leadership Development Program at Oregon State University
- Statewide Extern Leadership Development Program, Ferris State University, Big Rapids, Michigan

Summary

We have reviewed some of the problems confronting vocational administrators who are looking for viable options to improve their administrative competence. We have also looked briefly at (1) some of the research conducted to identify the important administrator competencies, (2) the modularized CBAE materials that have been developed, and (3) some of the alternative training program strategies being used to help vocational administrators achieve maximum competence. While none of these activities can be viewed as panaceas for all of the problems facing vocational administrators, they do offer viable opportunities and high-quality materials that can help you improve your administrative competence. If you haven't done so already, we recommend that you and your colleagues get personally involved in an organized CBAE program, or at least in your own individually planned professional development program.